

Park ranger adds personality and style all his own

story and photo by Bruce Hill, Jr., USACE Public Affairs

“Buenos Dias Señoras y Señores...,” said Phil Martinez, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Albuquerque District Park Ranger at Abiquiu, as he began addressing an all English-speaking USACE audience at a high-level Water Safety Committee meeting in Washington D.C. in April.

As committee members went around the room to individually introduce themselves, Martinez, representing the South Pacific Division on water safety, stood up, and in the Spanish language, introduced himself, and stated his purpose for attending the meeting and sat down.

“Then there was dead silence for awhile,” said Martinez. Finally, someone leaned over to another member and asked, “What did he say?”

Martinez’s point was to raise the question... How effective is the English language in addressing an emerging and diverse audience like that of Hispanic visitation to Corps lakes nationwide?

“I stated to them... Your confusion in what I just said is the same for Hispanic-speaking Corps (recreation area) visitors who don’t speak English.”

“No one in the room spoke Spanish at all,” said Martinez. “I didn’t realize it was going to be such an eye-opener that people (committee members) would talk about the introduction for days.”

Those who spend time with Corps park rangers may observe the sense of duty they possess, witness the multitude of tasks they perform, and realize the quality of character necessary to do their jobs well.

Those who spend time with Ranger Martinez may observe those same qualities, but with a personality and style that is all his own.

Affectionately known by coworkers and visitors as ‘Ranger Phil’, Martinez has been a park ranger for eight years with the Corps, a high school boy’s basketball coach for eighteen years, and a volunteer for a variety of causes throughout most of his life. He takes pride in doing a lot, which could call for yet another nickname, ‘Major Multi-tasker’.

From data entry to responding to radio calls, Martinez makes mental shifts almost daily, handling anything up to a potential crisis.

He’s the garbage man whenever the contractor is out, he handles phone calls like a switchboard operator, acts as a law enforcement officer, a translator, a janitor, a park attendant trainer, and even a landlord, checking on who is visiting and who has paid.

“I’ve never had a day where time didn’t fly by,” said Martinez. “There’s never enough time in a day.”

He’s a tour guide, water safety instructor, lifeguard, and a



USACE Park Ranger Phil Martinez at Abiquiu Lake Dam talks with a local from Santa Fe, New Mexico about how great the weather is for fishing.

supervisor of contract work.

I’m also a banker, he said. “Abiquiu Lake is a savings and loan water reservoir for the City of Albuquerque.”

At Abiquiu Dam Lake, one of the Corps’ most popular outdoor recreation sites, Martinez performs bilingual public service announcements, mentors through the National Hispanic Environmental Counsel, and actively promotes and supports more than 20 other local, regional and national programs each year as a ranger and a volunteer.

“My communication has been an inherent part of me for all my life,” said Martinez. “The Corps has allowed me to expand my communicative skills and even direct it toward diversity channels.”

More than 50,000 visitors stream onto the popular 2,800-acre recreation site at Abiquiu each year, and though the lakes popularity may create distinctive opportunities and challenges in communicating with the public on a professional level, Martinez’s style is one that is personal, meaningful, and one that people may tend to never forget.

“My most memorable experience working (as a Corps ranger) was when a wife, her husband and two kids were launching a boat into the lake and the wife looked sad. I asked why she didn’t have a smile on her face on such a beautiful day. She stated she was going through a divorce.

“I told her the weather is beautiful, we’re alive, there’s so much to live for and do, and you should enjoy the day with your family,” he said. We talked briefly, and she said I had so much enthusiasm and agreed with what I told her about the joys of life.

At the end of the day the family returned ashore and she stopped to tell me how my words and enthusiasm helped her be happy, and that she was able to talk with her husband and have a more positive outlook on life, said Martinez.

“They sure left happier that day than when they came in,” he said. 🏠